

Japan Christian Activity News

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KYODAN GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND VISIONS OF OIKOUMENE

The United Church of Christ in Japan met November 12-14, 1984, at Hakone near Tokyo for its General Assembly. Among the various important issues presented in the Assembly were: the differences of opinion which have prevented the Tokyo District Churches from holding their assembly for the last 20 years, issues concerning the unification of the Okinawan church, the Kyodan's policies for social action, agreement between the Taiwan Presbyterian Church and the Kyodan, and questions concerning pre-ordination examinations. Several international guests presented greetings on the second day of the Assembly.

The following is a translation of Dr. LEE In-Ha's message representing the NCC in Japan.

With these words I would like to express my thanks for being allowed to take part in the Kyodan General Assembly, and thereby hear the voices of debate. The sharp debate which has been heard in this Assembly helps to deepen our understanding of the Gospel as it is heard in Asia and throughout the world. I would like to share the contents of this debate with the member churches and groups of the NCCJ ecumenical body.

Some of the members of my congregation ask me why I participate in the ecumenical movement rather than concentrating all my efforts on my own church. The only answer to such a question is that the church is built by Jesus Christ. In this regard then, one can only say

that Christ is praying for us to unite. In spite of the fact that Jesus is praying for our unity, the debate indicates that the church is torn asunder. How do we respond to the prayer of Christ for a united church? Our only response to such is to understand that the church may be torn asunder, but in the final time when Christ is triumphant, all will be united. This is the eschatological hope. Therefore, we are reaching out to grasp the true unity in our own situation.

In the creation and continuing nurture of NCCJ, the Kyodan has played and continues to play a very important role. We are hoping also that this will continue to be the case in the future. However, the ecumenical movement is not only to be oriented toward responding to the prayer of Jesus. Not only is it important to be united, but the ecumenical movement must also provide a common witness within the ebb and flow of the totality of history, both in its particularity and universality. This is the true meaning and content of OIKOUMENE.

For the last three years, the theme of the NCCJ has been "Christ with the Least of These." In this context, we have been able to come to terms more fully with the problems of the powerless in society as seen in "Buraku" issues, in relation to Koreans in Japan, and in understanding the plight of the handicapped. This is a true blessing for our eyes have been opened to what we were blind to in the past.

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KYODAN Continued

We have shared the opportunity to strengthen our fellowship with churches in other Asian countries. Recently we welcomed ten church delegates from the Peoples Republic of China, which is something that we have never done before. Through this dialogue and fellowship, there was greater strength brought to the body of Christ. Through this we are able to overcome the anguish of our history, and thereby generate a new set of creative relationships. We have also entered into new relationships with the churches of the Philippines. We must, as Christians, take more seriously the Japanese economic aggression which is destroying Asia, and through this we will be able to deepen KOINONIA.

True love is not circumscribed by mere sharing of a common understanding or sharing of material wealth. It is rather defined by the ability to truly share in the sufferings of others. The real question that we have to ask is: "Has the NCCJ really been able to share in the pain and suffering of the United Church of Christ in Japan?" Has the pain of the Kyodan ever been shared with the other churches in Japan? In this regard, I sincerely think that we must repent our indifferent attitude and hope that you will share your pain and suffering with the rest of the Body of Christ. My prayer and hope is for this sharing to come to pass, so that we may unite in our task of bringing light to the world. #

ANGLICAN CHURCH SUPPORTS PHILIPPINE DIOCESE

In a landmark step of the East Asia Anglican Bishops Conference in Osaka October 23-26, Primate Bishop Watanabe of the Japan Anglican Church (NSKK) requested the denomination's women's committee to answer a need for aid from the Northern Diocese of the Philippine Episcopal Church. The aid sent, in the amount of ¥2,000,000 is earmarked for work toward improving the social well-being of Filipinos in Northern Luzon. The Northern Luzon area is largely composed of cultural

minority groups (Igorots) living in and around the Cordillera mountains. The Philippine Episcopal Church in that region is said to be made up of 90% Igorot people, and therefore, said one NSKK member, "it can't help but be concerned with their living conditions and the forced development programs of the Philippine government which so directly affect their lives."

NSKK's concern for its Episcopal sisters and brothers in the Philippines is something which has evolved through a process of exchanges between Japan and the Philippines in recent years. Dr. James Endo, staff of NCC Center for Christian Response to Asian Issues with special concern for the Philippines, spent some months there in 1983. During that time, Endo was exposed to the human rights situations of the Cordillera mountain region and the effects of the development programs on village life. He heard testimonies of those living in hamlets to which they had been removed from their villages by the military, and learned of the struggles of the Igorots to maintain their ancestral land, their agrarian way of life, and their dignity. As a result of this, the Mid Japan Diocese issued a statement of support November 3, 1983, condemning the military abuse of the Igorot peoples and expressing solidarity with their struggle. It was the first official statement of the NSKK concerning the Philippine situation.

Returning the exchange in July 1984, Victor Ananayo, a member of the Northern Diocese who is a national minority, was invited as a guest speaker to a gathering of the NSKK Student Christian Movement in Okinawa. There on the island, he was able to observe first hand Filipinas working in the entertainment business. This drew the connection for him of the exploitation of the Philippines, even outside the nation. He reflected on this on his speaking tour to various dioceses including Osaka, Nagoya and Tokyo following the Okinawa meeting.

Primate Bishop Watanabe recommended to the Women's Committee to designate the Northern Diocese as the recipient of their annual giving project. #

KOREA UNIFICATION FOCUS OF WCC MEETING

The World Council of Churches Commission of the Churches on International Affairs held a consultation at the Tozanso Conference Center near Tokyo October 29 through November 2, under the theme "Ecumenical Consultation on Peace and Justice in Northeast Asia: Prospects for Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts." This was a significant international meeting, for WCC organized this kind of consultation for the first time; it put focus on the political situation in Northeast Asia, especially on North-South Korean tension, and sought the way to facilitate the opening of contact and dialogue between South and North Korean churches and Christians.

Considering that the two Koreas are two of the most militarized countries in the world, that the tension is a domestic as well as international problem, involving USA, USSR and other Asian countries, and that Korean peoples and especially Christians have strong aspirations for unification, we have to say that we should have had this meeting far earlier.

South Korean church delegates met with delegates from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, and from the East and the West. Koreans emphasized the evil of the South-North division of the Korean people, for which the United States, the Soviet Union and Japan are more responsible than Korea itself. The division has caused and intensified militarization, ideological conflict, economic pressure and threats to democracy in and around the Korean peninsula. However, it was really wonderful to see in the consultation that the recognition of the need for dialogue across ideological lines is definitely growing.

The Korean Christians discussed about "peace" from the viewpoint of the people who suffer the oppression and injustice, stressed that shalom is well-being and justice for the people, and showed the aspiration for unification which has grown through their struggle for human rights and democracy.

Other Northeast Asians contributed to this point. A Hong Kong participant, Mr. Christopher Lam, explained how churches in Hong Kong should work for the welfare of the people in the coming situation in which communism and capitalism will live under one roof in Hong Kong. The Churches' mission is to seek democracy, to weed out injustice and to heal the injured, and to promote the people's self-respect instead of self-pity. Taiwanese delegate Prof. Ingram Seah, advocated self-determination of the whole people in Taiwan, referring to two historic statements issued by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan in 1971 and 1977. All these presentations contributed to seeking peace in a more solid way in this region.

Participants from Western countries also had much to contribute. Dr. Cornelius von Heyl of West Germany gave a clear view of reconciliation in his own context. Archbishop Vladimir of the USSR and other participants from Eastern Europe impressed Korean and other Asian participants about the faithfulness of Christians in socialist countries. All these exchanges provided an occasion for real dialogue with Korean participants.

As Japanese Christians, we should examine theologically the past sins of supporting the national policy of colonization of Korea, and trace the history of conscientious Christians in Japan who resisted this trend, so that we may achieve a reorientation of church thought. On the basis of this reorientation, we should work together with other citizens to change public opinion and pressure the government to change its policies, especially for demilitarization, and work for supporting democratization struggle in Korea and for the rights of Korean residents in Japan. To work internationally, with KNCC, CCA, WCC and churches such as in USA, Taiwan, USSR and China is very important for these purposes.

By Rev. SHOJI Tsutomu

LIVING FAITH IN SAN-IN, JAPAN

The beautiful city of Matsue near Lake Sinjiko in San-in was the setting for the biannual lay people's assembly of the Kyodan's Nishi-Chugoku district November 22-23. There, two hundred men and women gathered together under the theme "Living Faith Today--How we see Christ with Others". I was invited to speak to the meeting.

Nishi-Chugoku District is one of the most prominent districts of the Kyodan for its commitment to the social responsibility of the church. It has supported activities and projects in many areas, including the Hiroshima Christian Social Center, the Seireien home for elderly atomic bomb victims, the movement to bring Korean bomb victims to Hiroshima for treatment, various peace movements, actions on behalf of Korean residents in Japan, Buraku people and the Serendipity Community Center in Iwakuni which ministers to residents and Iwakuni U.S. military personnel.

These activities are supported by nearly all churches in the district. However, in the San-in area, the northern region of the district, most churches are concerned with the succession of faith to their children and how to retain a congregation. These are major concerns because of the difficulty in propagating the Gospel in that area where Buddhism and Shintoism are practiced so heavily.

Although modernization has changed much of Japan, in this rural countryside area, traditional religious practice persists in the minds and habits of people, in their fellowship with one another, and in their customs and festival observances. These factors make for "rocky ground" in terms of the response to Christian evangelism.

The younger generation is greatly influenced by secularization and tends to move to the larger cities in the south, leaving the churches with a dwindling older membership. Some

churches in San-in hold Sunday services with less than ten people in attendance. What is the living faith in a context such as this? Some of the answers to that question may be as follows:

1) During the lay assembly, through lectures and discussions we reaffirmed that worship is a joyful celebration and an expression of thanksgiving to God for the abundant grace given us through Jesus Christ. However small a church is, we celebrate the grace of God; the mere act of congregating itself is in that sense an expression of joy. Therefore, the existence of the church itself has undeniable significance. Prayer of intercession is also deeply meaningful in that church of village and city people. Christians can worship full of peace and joy and through that worship itself, they are witnessing to the reign of God. Therefore, it is very important to express that joy more freely, removing it from the constricts of traditional patterns and unchanging worship styles. That is the way to break through the difficulties around evangelism.

2) Rejoicing with grace also has itself a challenging significance in modern times. It has a place in combatting the idols of power and competition and reaffirms the dignity of human life created in the image of God. This, then is the real basis for overcoming devaluation of others and competition. In the face of isolation, these small rural churches can succeed in the confidence their faith provides. For, in a small church, Christians can see clearly that "We are no better than pots of earthenware to contain this treasure, and this proves that such transcendent power does not come from us, but is God's alone," (II Cor. 4:7). This is the challenge to boastful human pride.

3) "The love of Christ leaves us no choice" but to respond with action, (II Cor. 5:15) and when we are encouraged to respond and work with people, we discover that Jesus is already at work with them. (Mt. 25:31ff). One example is the work of Jesus among the Buraku. Buraku people feel deeply the

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REFLECTIONS ON A MINORITY CONFERENCE: IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS--FUTURE CHALLENGES

Friday October 26-28, a historic conference took place. For the first time ever, the four minority groups of Japan met to discuss their past, present and future. The four groups are: 1) Ainu--the indigenous people who first lived on these islands, pushed into native people's reserves in Hokkaido.

2) Buraku--an outcaste group, considered impure and even sub-human.

3) Okinawan--people of the Okinawan islands, the first victims of Japanese colonial imperialism, now exploited by the Japanese and the United States military.

4) Koreans--brought to Japan as labourers before and during WWII, whose Japanese nationality was taken away from them.

Student and housewife activists, professors, church pastors, poets and activist leaders met in an active expression of solidarity to discuss their group and personal histories, their present struggles, and their visions for the future. One might imagine that a meeting of minority people sharing stories of oppression at the hands of an intolerant Japanese society would be a depressing affair. On the contrary--it was a celebration! There was sharing of differences, pooling of ideas, self-expression, and challenges for the future.

Each group is unique in its history and current problems, yet all share a common struggle against structural and personal discrimination by the mainstream Japanese society. They are striving to improve their conditions, change discriminatory laws, find their identities, and to be proud of who they are.

What made this conference unique is that the participants did not fall into any institutional category. It was not professors and church leaders asking minority people about their experiences to see how they could help; it was minority people sharing

their ideas and experiences with each other.

During one of the various group and panel presentations, I looked at the people in the room. Heads were cocked with smiles and affirming nods as they soaked in the words. One could almost see the feelings resonating in the listener's eyes. This connection is something which only those who have suffered in similar ways can feel. This empathy, and the excitement of hearing one's feelings expressed by another person was alive in the room.

In the evening, the official meetings terminated. Cultural sharing and celebration began!

Kang Hae Ja, dressed in a neon-bright Korean dress, led off with a twirling fan dance. The Ainu participants sang songs in the Ainu language, danced, played Ainu instruments, and led us in a folk dance. The lively Okinawans danced to the tune of a jamisen player's singing and got us all dancing freely around the room. A quiet Ainu woman shared her boisterous, emotional poetry, and a Korean woman poet did a reading to yelps and cheers of appreciation. The parties continued deep into the night. Korean Makkoli (thick and sour rice wine), Okinawan Shochu (strong rice whiskey), and Japanese beer flowed as the microphone circled and people sang songs. We learned Korean activist songs, Okinawan love songs, and on my turn everyone joined in to sing, "We Shall Overcome."

What impressed me and other non-minority people, was the fact that these groups (with the exception of the Buraku people who are immersed in the dominant national culture), all have definable cultures. It is concrete; language, dance, song, and customs. For the Ainu, Okinawans, and Koreans, this culture is something precious which they want to share with their children and with their children's children. Protection and creative promotion of this culture are crucial since the subtle and effective assimilation forced upon them by the Japanese society is threatening to swallow them up.

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MINORITY CONFERENCE, Continued...

There are groups which try to deal with this threat and other problems such as: problems of getting into good schools, hiring discrimination, unsanitary conditions in residential areas, safety hazards in the work places, trials against Koreans who refuse to be fingerprinted, land grabbing, and high unemployment among all these groups.

In Hokkaido, there is an Ainu group called the Utari Association which is doing some positive work. The Buraku people have the Buraku Kaiho Domei (Buraku Liberation League). This League has been active for quite a while and is a powerful lobbying and activist group.

In Okinawa and in Osaka there are various groups, including a support group of women who oppose the profuse American military presence in Okinawa. During this conference two group leaders met and now are enthusiastically planning events together.

The Koreans have Korean Christian activists, and both North and South affiliated groups, which deal with discrimination, human rights, and community issues. Korean schools and women in particular, put great effort and time into learning and teaching Korean instruments, songs, dance, and the Korean language. It is here among these Korean women where I see the possibility of a women's liberation movement among the minority peoples. On a wider scale, the future for these minority groups has real potential. There has been some progress, but this conference planted the seeds of heightened group understanding, solidarity, and personal friendships.

The four groups have been 'Japanized' and speak a common language. Also, they are small and dispersed, so there is almost no antagonism between them. This factor is crucial because, different from many minority groups, instead of squabbling (robbing, murdering) between groups, these Japanese minorities have identified

and struggle against a common oppressor. In this is their strength, and with increasing solidarity, there is hope for the future.

As for myself, I felt no alienation, at which I was happily amazed. Despite me being an "elite-whitface-male-American", they made me feel like one of them. I think one reason they were able to accept me is that as minority people they have a special opportunity to become aware. Because they are victims of labeling, stereo-typing, and oppression, they can see the absurdity of this type of surface judging. They can transcend this type of thinking to realize it is one's expression of love and humanness that is essential. It is here, in this expression, where all of us can join together!

By Andrew C. Bartlett

Korean Christian Center, Osaka

LIVING FAITH, Continued...

pain and compassion which Jesus knew, thus illuminating Jesus' own compassion. But when the church tries to monopolize Jesus, the result is a stagnated faith rather than the living Christ. If we seek Jesus among the suffering, the desperate and those who are grappling with people's lives and issues, then we see Jesus anew with surprise and joy. This is the way in which the church's vision is widened and faith renewed. With that conviction of broader vision, we can more freely have dialogue with other religions and more readily work together with other faiths.

A church which commits itself to issues of human and social concern risks offending and losing some of its membership. This is true of the churches in Nishi-Chugoku District. But in order to be true to the faith they profess, the choice to continue engagement in social action is made both joyfully and deliberately. Though these churches know the risk of declining membership all too well, their witness to change and commitment to justice perseveres. In confidence, I can say in the end, the membership will grow for the three above mentioned reasons.

By Rev. Shoji Tsutomu #

PEACE ACTIVISTS OF YOKOSUKA JAPAN

A small but committed grassroots peace group--this was the impression gained from a visit to the Yokosuka area October 26. The visit was an opportunity to get a first-hand view of the American presence there, and to meet members of the local peace group.

Shegeki SUZUKI and Rev. Takeshi KIMURA are two activists of the small anti-base movement in Yokosuka. Mr. Suzuki, a member of the Japanese Socialist Party, makes his living as a taxi driver. Rev. Kimura is a pastor of a Yokosuka Kyodan congregation. Together they described and demonstrated the extent and the effect of the American military presence.

Suzuki explained that Yokosuka has long been the site of military installations. With its strategic location and ideal harbour conditions, Yokosuka was used extensively by the Japanese Imperial Navy prior to the establishment of the massive American base. Today the Japanese Self Defense Forces work closely with the American Forces and have several important defense facilities in Yokosuka.

The expertise of the Yokosuka activists was evident in their meticulously gathered and documented evidence. For people who are neither American nor long-time residents in Japan, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to have an accurate understanding of the size of the American Navy base without seeing it. Mr. Suzuki was able to list, describe and actually point out the many different American ships --aircraft and helicopter carriers, destroyers, mine-sweepers, mine-droppers, troop ships, supply ships and more. In viewing the various ships from different vantage points around the bay, what was perhaps more disturbing than their actual presence was the activity one could see going on aboard and around them. The concept of "combat readiness" became suddenly very clear. Here were hundreds of American and a large number of Japanese who concern themselves daily with

actively preparing for war.

Those in Yokosuka who actively work for peace are a varied group. Others besides Mr. Suzuki and Rev. Kimura included a retired man who for most of his life had worked against militarization in the Yokosuka area. As a conscientious objector during World War II, he had long ago recognized the link between the poverty of his family and those around him and the money poured into the Japanese military effort by the state. Another man, who had grown up on an island near Okinawa, was the only non-Christian among those present at the October 26 meeting. A lawyer by profession, he became actively involved in the anti-base movement at the time peace groups began anti-tomahawk missile protests. During his childhood he had seen the devastation of war through the bombing of his village and the death of many he knew. He is now strongly committed to work against Japan ever having or harbouring the military capacity to again inflict such destruction on others or invite it on themselves. Mr. Shinagawa, a Yokosuka stationery store owner, felt that though the actual number of activists may be small, more and more Yokosuka people are beginning to be aware of the impact of such militarization in their own lives.

A key goal of the activists in Yokosuka, as elsewhere in Japan, is to reach the ever-growing number of Japanese who have no direct experience with war. The militarization of their lives, their city or their country must never be seen as normal or necessary. This goal of public education is understood by the Yokosuka group to be every bit as vital as the continuing protest against American forces, American missiles, and Japanese re-armament.

By Patti Talbot

WITH THANKS...

In response to the appeal from Atsugi citizens regarding the noise pollution caused by military exercises (JCAN Oct. issue), letters of support have been received from Rev. Wesley M. Cummins, Kobe Japan, and an Atsugi support group in San Juan Philippines. Thank you!

NATIONALIST FILIPINO VISITS JAPAN

Maita Gomez, leader of the Filipino feminist nationalist organization GABRIELA (the General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action--see JCAN, July 1984) visited Tokyo October 17 to November 8, lecturing and appealing for recognition of the nationalist movement by Japanese groups. She was invited by the Japan Women's Council, a mass organization of the Japan Socialist Party, to speak at a women's rally of 1,000 on the reunification of North and South Korea and appeared on television news interviews and newspaper spots describing the present crisis in the Philippines. Her target groups in Tokyo included the Japan Socialist Party and the Sohyo Labor Union from which she attempted to illicit support and recognition for the Nationalist Alliance of the Philippines. She asked that they send delegations to the Philippines to observe the human rights and economic situation there.

On the evening of November 4, a new Tokyo-based Filipino association held a forum which was targeted to the Filipino population in Tokyo. Over 100 people gathered at St. Anselm's Church to hear Ms. Gomez review the current situation of their country. The Philippines is suffering from 35% unemployment and 60% inflation under Marcos' rule. Ms. Gomez illustrated the rapid inflation with the example of a package of instant ramen noodles. The Japanese imported product which the average family would buy for 6 pesos (or US 30¢) three years ago, has jumped to 30 pesos (or US \$1.50) at the present time.

Ms. Gomez moved on to describe the plight of factory workers who are not able to survive on the minimal wages they earn. They are further oppressed by their inability to strike because of the 30-day notice law requiring unions to declare their intention to strike ahead of time, thus often running the chance of management retaliation, lay-offs, firing, and increasingly, military abuse. Ms.

Gomez said that since the declaration of Martial Law in 1972, there has been a lack of basic human rights. As unemployment continues to rise, the Philippines continues to borrow more and more money, digging itself deeper and deeper into debt.

"The United States government plays an important role in the Reagan-Marcos regime," said Gomez. She mentioned the nuclear weapons stored in the U.S. Naval Base at Subic Bay, and the Nuclear Power Plant in Bataan which services primarily the U.S. military bases and the trans-national corporations.

Questions and answers with a primarily Filipino audience on November 4 took on a distinctly different tone from those one usually finds at such a meeting. Reactions varied from not understanding why U.S. "aid" is harmful for the Philippines since the country so obviously needs the economic resources to those who supported Gomez's nationalist work for the removal of Marcos. Clarifying the danger of tightening relations between the United States and the Philippines, Gomez explained the system of dependence on foreign capital and dominating countries which characterizes the present relationship. "Needing the money is one thing," Gomez explained, "but nobody deserves to be oppressed."

While some Filipinos present seemed generally aware of the economic crisis of the Philippines, others were surprised to learn of the connection this grave situation has with military repression and violations in human rights.

The meeting was closed with the singing of the nationalist hymn "Ang Bayan Ko" (which means "My Country").

*The Philippines,
My cherished land
My home of sorrows and tears
Always I dream of seeing
you truly free.*

By Claudia Genung

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